

Rock-Glade Watershed, WRIA 31

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Rock-Glade Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the best strategies for securing water for a future project or proposal in this area.

Many areas of eastern Washington are arid, receiving less than 20 inches of rain annually. Most of the precipitation arrives during the winter months when water demands are the lowest. During the summer, the snowpack is gone, there is little rain, and naturally low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. At the same time, the demand for human uses, including irrigation, are at the yearly maximum. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

Factors affecting water availability

Much of the water in the Rock Glade Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, declining groundwater levels, and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 31, especially during the summer months.

Most streams in the watershed are dry much of the year and thus surface water is physically very limited. The availability of groundwater within the basin is also extremely limited due to its close connection to surface water sources.

The Columbia River is the major source of surface water use in the watershed, but the river is highly regulated for power generation and instream flow protection. Applications for surface water withdrawals from the mainstem Columbia River are subject to the Instream Resource Protection Program for the Columbia River (<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-563>), as are any proposed groundwater withdrawals determined to have a significant and direct impact on the Columbia River.



Definitions

WRIA: Water Resources Inventory Area; also known as a watershed or river basin. For environmental administration and planning purposes, Washington is divided up into 62 major watersheds, or WRIsAs.

Water supply available for new uses

Surface water and groundwater availability is currently very limited throughout the basin. The Rock Glade Watershed Plan (www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/31.html) developed by local stakeholders provide additional information regarding water availability and storage opportunities.

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) is aggressively pursuing water supply development opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin. Basin-specific water supply projects OCR is currently pursuing include the Kennewick Aquifer Storage and Recovery Project and the Horse Heaven Hills Project. You can find additional information at the OCR Web site: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html.

John Day\ McNary Reserve (Chapter 173-531 WAC, <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-531A>) provides a reserve of 1.32 million acre feet of water per year to irrigate 330,000 acres, and 26,000 acre feet per year for future municipal supply. This reserve is subject to the Instream Resource Protection Program for the Columbia River as defined in Chapter 173-563 WAC (<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-563>).

The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of ground water (most commonly single residential well owners) to construct wells and develop their water supplies without obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. For more information about the groundwater permit exemption, refer to www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf.

Additional options for finding a water supply include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Processing a change application through the Benton County, Klickitat County, or Yakima County water conservancy board.
- Processing an application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. Refer to www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf.

For more information on these and other options, refer to “Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing” www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf.

Pending water right applications in this watershed

Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received.

Ecology asks anyone who needs a water right (new, change, or transfer) to submit the pre-application consultation form and meet with us to review your water supply needs and project proposal.

- Apply for a New Water Right
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html

The map in this document shows some of the factors that will be considered when evaluating water right permit applications. Here are some information sources to assist you with your research:

- Locate and research water rights on land parcels anywhere in the state (Water Resource Explorer)
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/info/webmap.html>
- Pending Water Right Applications by County
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/tracking-apps.html>
- Subscribe to a water right application RSS feed for a county or WRIA
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr_app_rss.html
- WRIA map showing the total number of water right claims, certificates, permits and applications
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/Images/pdf/waterright-wria-maps.pdf>
- Search and view well reports using a variety of search tools
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterresources/map/WCLSWebMap/default.aspx>

Further Information

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If you need this document in a version for the visually impaired, call the Water Resources Program at 360-407-6872. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341

